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The Lebanese Foundation For Permanent Civil Peace

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Building Social Policies for Lebanon in the Aftermath of War.

Dimensions, Obstacles and Potentialities

Summary*

**A Résumé of the Proceedings of a Workshop
in the Conference Center in Aya Napa (Cyprus)**

**The Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace
7-13/09/1994**

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* For more details refer to the Arabic text in full (35 pages) which is to be published in three parts in *al-Nahar* during October 1994

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What is the link between social policies and civil peace? In a pluralistic society, if a disparity in the living standards is added to variegated regions and communities, there's every chance that a conflict might break out. The ones who are poor or on the poverty line feel concerned with what is going on around them. If a poor fellow is looking through dustbins for useful objects and falls upon an old magazine, he sees people neatly dressed eating fancy food in fancy restaurants and this, as well as other ads along the roads, will make him aware of his deprivation. In this way, the two social theories of accumulated cleavages and relative deprivation acquire greater importance as communication between people grows.

But in order to elaborate social policies we have to go beyond scientific studies. We have to exert some pressure on official bodies and civil associations. We also have to set off from a spirit of social service and a comprehensive concept of public welfare as economic growth does not necessarily tackle social problems such as delinquency, handicaps and disparities in the distribution of revenues.

The central authorities have three tasks as concerns social policies:

1. To establish and maintain a balance through legislation (Labor law, regulating lease contracts, etc.)
2. To allocate public resources (Housing, education, social security, etc.)
3. To ensure social services (Social welfare, health, etc.)

The use of the plural "Social policies" has a great significance. Social policies aim at:

1. Protecting individuals and groups as regards family issues, health, housing, education, etc.
2. Linking general economic policies with qualitative choices in social organisation. If the choice is a liberal or a central one then the authorities have to respect it and put it into effect. Social choices are related to a social philosophy.

3. Fighting social diseases.

In order to establish the framework and concepts of these policies, the Foundation has organized a workshop on the 7-13/09/94 in which twenty researchers and social workers took part. During this workshop, the historical, political, social, professional, legal and cultural dimensions of building social policies in Lebanon were discussed (1). The aim of the meeting was not to put forward solutions but to clarify the problems, the concepts, the bases, the obstacles and the potentials so that the solutions may be in keeping with reality and may be applicable.

1

Two Historic Experiences:

Fouad Shihab and Archbishop Grégoire Haddad

Two historical trends have emerged in Lebanon: on an official level, that of President Fu'ad Shihab who established the bases of a social policy and a well-balance growth; and on the level of civil associations, the trend of the *Social Movement* with Archbishop Grégoire Haddad.

Social policies in Lebanon went through four stages:

1. " The ante - Shihabî phase and everything being "in God's hands". In case a misfortune befell a family or if a child was born, the family, the community, the maternal or paternal uncle were always there. The family solidarity was of great use.

2. The Shihabi phase in which institutions are created and plannification is adopted.

3. The war phase in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990 in which infringement of social rights and other rights is at its utmost. Rights become privileges.

4. A new phase in which *social rights* are gradually being re-created: no privileges and no mendicity."

Due to Lebanon's position, the pattern of social policies has been "created by communal institutions in their positive side".

What is Lebanon's situation today as far as the development of social and economic ideas is concerned? Lebanon is heading today towards the elaboration of social rights as the citizen's claim and the State's debt namely as concerns the right to education, the right to a good health, as well as the right to a house and the right to work. Civil associations are spreading these concepts among people. But not all are aware of these concepts.

No data is available as far as immigration, foreign workers, naturalization and age groups are concerned. So how is it possible to get acquainted with facts in order to prepare some plan? One possible alternative is to resort to "coordination with other data centers. The civil society may become a civil planning center. A group of civil institutions may create a data network."

Several problems are raised by the political dimension of social policies: is the Lebanese system plutocratic? Is parliamentary representation restricted to upper classes? What is the use of professional representation in Parliament? What is the role of the Economic and Social Council which is to be created? What is the role of social influential forces? Do some of the deputies have social aims? Can a political class made out of mainly rich individuals have a clear vision of social problems? How can such a vision be made clearer? The example of Abdallah al - Hajj who fought, during the '50s against widespread social problems, was brought up.

Do Lebanese businessmen have some sort of a project? The problem lies in "the gap between the center of decision - making, the center of production and the brain center."

The issue of foreign influence on social policies was also raised-namely as regards foreign workers. Foreign interference in internal decisions has become common. "In Europe, farmers discard their crops on the streets every day to protest against European policy. The Lebanese situation allows more interference."

How can social associations break through political and party structures? The past is "weighting down" on political parties in Lebanon and "hindering their development." "Political parties have nothing to say to people after having used up their ideologies."

We cannot talk about social policies without linking them with citizenship, i.e the citizen's role in participation and construction. Yet Lebanon has suffered from solidarity. "We are a group in which each one protects the other and solidarity is firm. But we destroy the society and hinder lawful social communication". Our children are better than we, "they are more aware of their environment and of public issues".

2

The Social Bond and the Middle Class

The points that emerge from the workshop organised by the Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace are: the necessity to make the social bond stronger, to create attractive poles in certain geographical regions, to revive the middle class and to have people participating in social life.

Each community has its social policies, some of which are open to all communities. The General Secretariat of Catholic Schools announced in 1994 that "Catholic Schools are for all." Education for all because "there are Christian and Muslim students on earth. Some hospitals are communal. But the patients are not admitted pursuant to their identity. These hospitals are owned by communities but they serve the whole society. Will this solidarity pattern change into a civil global solidarity?"

Social policies are concerned, first and foremost, with the ones who live on the fringes of society: "We are not so much concerned with 50% of the population. Social policies aim first at improving the living conditions of 20% of those who are helpless. The crux of the problem of poverty is the power of the people to take their own decisions. The so-called poverty map concerns in fact those who are excluded from participation to political decisions."

Abroad, the Lebanese poverty map is the opposite of what it is inside: " Those who left were not rich. Poor families used to choose one of their members and send them abroad. The Lebanese individual can always manage. So, he does not bother with social policies. But the international crisis shows that immigration is no longer a solution."

Remote regions feel neglected. "When we cut a road to a remote and poor region without building the right economic and social infrastructure in the said region, those who are poor leave their land and drift to the city. Each region should have its own living facilities and attractive poles. Social policies should create equal attractive poles among regions drawing people to the latter . The basis of cities is the creation of attractive poles."

As far as the middle class is concerned, it is still existent. It constitutes about 49 to 50% of the population. 3% are rich, 10% are prosperous and 3% do not manage with the cost of living which is around 560 \$ per month in Lebanon. Before the war, the middle-class was defined according to the cost of living. This class has been greatly impoverished. It includes public executives, high school and school teachers, judges, lawyers, university graduates. The social élite is therefore on the verge of becoming poor. Workers and technicians climbed the social scale and are now in the upper middle class. So who replaced them? Mostly those who were the victims of great changes, namely farmers. The middle class is the human pool and social strength of the legal State. When people become mostly either rich or poor, the threat of dictatorship grows." The middle class in its different levels creates a "social adjustment."

The concept of social interference appeared as poverty grew. Certain steps were taken in Bayqût, Burj Barajînah and Baysûr to encourage the participation of the population.

The individual's contribution and initiative to fight poverty are extremely important. Some examples of these: "The street vendors who now have a market in Rawshah. Poor people joined hands and formed a joint stock company. An other example is the co-op. of Bi'r al-'Abd. Social ambition produces doctors whose fathers are porters."

3

Official Administrations: How to Reorganise Public Services

Official social administrations give social services. They allocate and distribute money for social policies. They levy taxes and duties for public interest. The administrations are mainly: the Ministry of Social Affairs, The Ministry of Employment , the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Immigrants, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture, Social Security, the Workers Co-op, the Council of the South, etc..

The major basic questions that are raised here are as follows: what is the difference between the Ministry of Employment and that of Social Affairs? Are the ministries organized in a way to meet social requirements? What is their effectiveness? What is the quality and the extent of their services? How aware are the citizens of these administrations and how well are they acquainted with them? What is the relation between social official administrations and how well do they know them? What is the relation between social official administrations and civil institutions as private hospitals, schools and non governmental social associations?

Privatisation in certain fields does not mean "giving power to individuals in the absence of public administrations. Private institutions will act as if they are in charge of the people and exercise their activities through the guarantees given by the central authorities". In this context, another issue was raised, that of "putting up the tasks of given Ministry for tender to any private company because the central administrative body is inexistent and has no more capacities."

In order to ensure social services, public administrations have to establish a well-organized and clear tax relation between the authorities and the citizens. This clarity has disappeared from the administration of public funds and budget expenditures have not been submitted to the Parliament for years. As far as taxes are concerned - a factor of equal distribution of revenues and equal social services - the following questions are raised: Which social classes pay taxes? What influence do taxes have on the social situation? Who pays and who doesn't? Poor and middle classes, wage earners and citizens are usually the ones who pay their taxes. Anyway, Lebanese citizens "are not used to paying." "It seems that duties on services eat up minimum wages." The debates show, in brief, the necessity to move from "a *treasury* concept which is a royal and an imperial concept to one of *public funds* provided by citizens in exchange of general services."

During the debate, other issues were discussed namely the frame of the organisation of unions, the changes in some professions, the social demands of some unions, the role of the Economic and Social Council - which is to be created - as far as social policies are concerned.

There are four ways to deal with social conflicts:

1. To repress conflicts: the governments then amuse themselves with conflicts in order to have greater control over the society.
2. To evade conflicts, in other terms, trying to control social leaders, to tame or allure them by posts and services.

3. To foresee conflicts, i.e. to tell that they are to happen and to prevent them by dealing with their causes."

Several changes occurred and influenced professional structures. "Professionals used to be affluent. Those who had a job never felt the need for public medical care. With the social changes, the crisis hit these categories as well. The social forces with limited revenues and who feel the pressure are those who ask the most for social policies."

Concerning the organisation of unions, the latter went through many difficulties to oppose the project establishing one federation which would include all unions of the professional field. According to international treaties and in the name of Union rights "one (Federation) should not be imposed nor should several (ones)". Licenses were given to a great number of unions as if to say: you don't want one, then have several ones. The attempt to check the role of categories with limited revenues was obvious so that they do not express demands. The federal decision in unions is weak because the federal organisation is not in keeping with reality. The union employees school went on for only three years and was rejected even by union leaders.

Two trends emerge as preparations for the Economic and Social Council are being carried out: "First, a dispute between the Parliament and the Council of Ministers: Whether the Economic and Social Council should be close to the first and against the second. Other attempts aim at depriving the Economic and Social Council of any effectiveness by giving it consultative power and influencing the nomination of its members."

Other issues were brought up namely: the role of legislation in regulating and creating a balance, the role of the law and the judiciary in social protection, and the importance of updating laws namely those laws that concern families and women.

Laws can be studied through the following social dimensions:

1. Their influence on the family, especially regarding marriage, legacy, age groups, and old age.
2. The organisation of the social and geographical space: construction laws; town planning; appropriations; the environment , decentralization; the relation between the cities and the country, etc.
3. Social rights: Labour law: social security benefits; education; health; housing; the establishment of companies; taxes, etc.
4. Public order and deviancy; social corruption; conscientiousness; nationalities; crime; etc.

As concerns leases, laws regulating them lack a clear social vision and have been influenced by some electoral interests going in favour of a numeral majority of leaseholders.

Is resorting to judicial authorities a privilege nowadays especially that the fees are expensive, and can the poor ones use the judiciary? Social protection requires independent and impartial judicial authorities.

The updating of laws with a pure administrative pattern is of no use to social change. Social policies preserve communities through a three - part strategy: Inclusion, integration and standardization. Parliamentary debate about notions and draft laws is essential because the opinions of both the consumer and the beneficiary are discussed. In the past, parliamentary debate was richer in that it took into account social daily issues. The women's situation and the legal culture have a part in the effective updating of laws and social change.

Culture and Supporting Values in Social Policies

Can we define cultural and quantitative dimensions of social policies? What positive aspects are to be found in our culture and how can we use them in social policies in the coming years? Each aspect in social policies has a quantitative side.

Three criteria can be distinguished:

1. That of belief which is still strong and has its effects on the society.
2. That of economic, mercantile exchange
3. That of flaws: "Every thing we have has a social flaw".

In some social works, we see: " People trying to make themselves poor because of their discontent and their thrift as regards appearances. The Lebanese citizens may start to think of living in a 50 m2 flat after being used to *prosperity* and *abundance*. When will families start being rational in spending instead of showing off?" The middle - class women had to work and to take care her of her job along with her house and family. Certain attitudes now try to defend this situation. The international thriftiness, cultural contacts and the struggle against racism help dispel reservations about modernization and genuineness. In Lebanon, the thyme croissant was concocted, and in Montreal 200 restaurants serve tabboulé and Hummus. How do we participate in worldwide - and we do not say American - culture, and make *tabboulé* in Montréal?"

Priorities are necessary in order to establish a policy with well-defined choices and limited costs. But the "problem is not priorities, nor houses, schools or hospitals. We have to build a social project in keeping with the needs of each region, a project that would ensure a follow-up in all regions and set some priorities. When we stick to reality, try to discover and listen, we can define comprehensive priorities. In one of the villages, the old ones are isolated and the young have immigrated. What is being done? An

old age home is being built; the village is put to death instead of bringing it back to life."

What are the basic needs? "Poverty in our (country) is that people are on the edge. If anything happens, nothing will check their fall. If a child is born the whole situation is disrupted. In modest schools, children have not yet received their report because they did not pay all their tuitions fees. People ask for fundamental things: education, drinking water, etc. In Zarariyyah, 9000 people were poisoned.

As far as work and unemployment are concerned, several primary specifications are necessary. Abroad, the unemployed is a person looking for a job. Agriculture workers as well as all workers in churches and mosques were somewhat a problem as they are not covered by labor laws.

Social policies require, as regards strategies, four parties; "A knowledge group, a witness group made out of social workers aware of the human message, the group in charge of directing the project, an experts group because field (work) alone is not sufficient."

"The root strategy" was brought up, i.e an effective nucleus in several regions and sectors; the possibility of directing some aspects of the compulsory military service of young men towards social development was also brought up."

The workshop organized by the Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace provides the conceptual frame to study social policies in Lebanon. When studying details, a great debate over concepts and bases will take place especially that no social theoretical approach is available in Lebanon even though the Lebanese experience is a rich one.

The basic methodology does not reside in ciphers and studies alone. One should talk to people, find out what their demands are and *listen* to them. Studies in social policies are *pluri-disciplinary*. If the approach is

restricted to one discipline it will only be a research subject. It is also a *human message* which makes it necessary for researchers to go beyond mere research competition and selfishness in knowledge. This approach requires a great deal of cooperation and support.

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Paragraphs that are between quotation marks are taken from the participants speeches of the workshop.